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ABSTRACT

The key to the improvement of teacher education lies in the identification of a set of problems that legitimately can claim to be so generic and important that all who teach will be familiar with them. Such problems are what case studies portray. Case studies constitute the problemata of the professional curriculum. In the present state of scholarship in and about education a consensus of learned opinion on generic problems is difficult to find, even though the potential for it exists. For these reasons, it is promising to seek a basis for consensus in a standard set of problems, or more specifically, a vidiotape portrayal of such a set. This paper describes a project currently underway at the University of Illinois to develop a videotape portrayal of problems shared by all teachers. Teachers participating in the project identified ten generic problem areas: (1) low status; (2) low student motivation; (3) parent-school relationship; (4) problems with administration; (5) too many non-instructional duties; (6) lack of time; (7) disicpline; (8) tracking, labeling and standardized testing; (9) expectations to solve societal problems; and (10) lack of funding. The project is developing 15 case studies illustrating these problems to be put on videotape for general use in teacher education programs. (JD)

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THE CASE FOR CASE STUDIES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

by

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THE CASE FOR CASE STUDIES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

The case study approach is familiar in law, medicine, and business. Various versions of it may be found in engineering, architecture, accounting, and education. However, case studies are used in the education of teachers, it is not common knowledge and, therefore, unlikely to be common practice. This failure to use case studies occurs despite the considerable bibliography describing case studies in various aspects of schooling. If the case study ought to become a central component in the education of the classroom teacher, as some of us believe, how it can be brought about?

The Uses and Misuses of Diversity

In common parlance school teaching is referred to as a profession. Teachers are expected to have college degrees; they are licensed by the state and belong to professional organizations. Their work requires the combination of theory and skill that distinguishes it both from a craft and from pure scholarship. However, despite the existence of colleges of education and departments of educational studies at many universities for a half century or more, the common reference to teaching as a profession does not reflect the actual status of the classroom teacher as measured by remuneration and social and academic recognition. More indicative of their status is that whenever the nation's schools come under fire -- as they are likely to do each decade[1] -- invariably the blame first falls on the alleged incompetence of the teacher. The complaints take two forms: teachers do not know their subjects; and if perchance they do, they cannot teach. Professors in the academic disciplines place the blame on colleges of education and, more particularly, on education courses. That Gallup polls consistently find that parents of school children rate teachers quite favorably -- especially in their own schools -- does not seem to impress the critics.

This persistent criticism of the school teacher is puzzling on several counts. Socially, the task they perform is acknowledged to be the foundation of everthing valuable in the culture, from good jobs to the loftiest ideals of democracy. The nature and norms of good teaching have been the concerns of scholars for centuries.

This paper cannot go into the reasons for this attitude toward teacher education. Reams have been writeen on the subject; commissions by the dozen have examined and re-examined the causes and proposed remedies. However, one factor has not received the attention it deserves, namely, the curious inability of teacher education to consolidate the gains that its history of scholarship, research, and service would warrant.

Why, for example, are there so many taxonomies of teaching, learning, curriculum design, objectives, and methodologies in the literature? Diversity of classification is characteristic of the early stages of a discipline. As scholarship in a field increases in scope and depth, a consensus on its concepts and modes of inquiry begins to emerge. In turn, this consensus becomes the basis for the paradigms[2] of induction of new generations of workers into the field.

Education for a profession professes a body of concepts that structures its field of practice. These it borrows from a variety of disciplines. For example, engineering depends on physics and mathematics, medicine on biology and physiology. Each professional field has its basic concepts, classifications, definitions, usages, and canonical literatures that at any given moment are not in dispute. If new discoveries are made at the frontier of its field or in its dependent disciplines, this structure may have to be modified; but it is not a privilege of anyone or everyone in the field to invent paradigms at will. A new paradigm has to earn a place in the consensus of the learned. In education, however, the books or articles that authors cite are likely to reflect those read while studying for the degree. Delightful and interesting as this diversity may be, it makes a shambles of teacher education's claim to a consensus of the learned.

Lawyers, doctors, and engineers, regardless of the university at which they received their training or where they are employed, are likely to use the same classifications and terminology to discuss the problems of their profession. Lawyers, doctors, and engineers read their professional journals, secure in the knowledge that what they read has been validated or challenged by their peers. The same cannot always be said about teachers or professors of education.

It was not always thus. For example, here are the titles of chapters in Exemplars of Teaching Method:[3]

> The Rhetoricians, Fathers of Method
> Teaching the Courtly Barbarians: Alcuin
> Scholasticism as a Method of Teaching: Abelard
> Ascham and the Jesuits on Methods of Teaching Classics to Gentlemen
> Teaching According to Nature: Comenius
> Nature and Object Lessons: Pestalozzi
> Dialectical Gardening: Froebel
> Instruction as Construction: Herbart
> Learning as Wholehearted Doing: Kilpatrick

Within a given period, agreement on style of teaching, concepts, tasks, terms, and criteria was not unusual.

The search for a method of teaching is a very old enterprise, as the list above indicates. Some methods were more pervasive than others, but by and large they fall into three classes (that is, according to my taxonomy). First is the didactic lesson in which the pupil is expected to acquire a repertory of correct responses to standard questions, e.g., the multiplication table, historical sequences, formulas, etc. Over the ages the method for this sort of teaching has remained much the same: first motivation, then the presentation of the task to be learned, inducement of the trial response, correction of the trial response, fixation of the correct response by repetition, test response, and evaluation.

Another famous model of teaching was the Socratic dialogue, or what might be called heuristic teaching. This proceeds by ingenious questioning, learning by discovery, etc. This method always has been extolled more than practiced; in the 1960s, the time of the new curricula in science and math, clever college professors demonstrated to bewildered classroom teachers how easy it was. Finally, there is what might be called philetic teaching, where the method is a polite form of seduction -- pupils learn because they like and want to please the teacher.[4]

By 166 B.C., Dionysius of Thrace had formalized the steps to be followed in presenting a lecture on a literary work: 1) Give the selected passages an exact reading with respect to pronunciation, punctuation, and theoretical expression; 2) Explain figures of speech; 3) Explain historical and mythological references; 4) Comment on the choice of words and their etymology; 5) Point out the grammatical forms employed; 6) Estimate the literary merit of the selection.[5]

These examples, however, are not taken from public schools that are pledged to reach <u>all</u> the children -- in schools supported by public funds but lacking a well-defined public.

Cases as Paradigms

Paradigms of teacher education cannot be commanded or legislated, albeit reform movements believe the contrary. Unless they grow out of the logic of the disciplines that support the generic activities of teaching, one can expect only nominal conformity in response to such legislation. Furthermore, variety is essential to creativity and progress in any enterprise. It is a well-worn cliche to praise variety within unity -- theme and variations, so to speak. However, a public school system has a hard time avoiding a theme with no variation and variations in search of a theme. Public education implies that all who are subjected to it will face a set of similar tasks in similar ways and will emerge with similar learnings.

That is why the key to the improvement of teacher education lies in the identification of a set of problems that <u>legitimately</u> can claim to be so generic and important that all who teach will be familiar with them. Such problems are precisely what case studies portray. In legal education, case studies set forth the situation being litigated, the evidence presented, the edicts of the jury and the judge, actions on appeals, etc. They become part of the history of jurisprudence. In time they become models for legal argument and decision and an important component of legal studies.

Case studies in medicine consist of careful descriptions of a disease entity, its history, symptoms, and treatment. They also may include the theoretical explanation of the malady and an evaluation of various modes of treatment.

Case studies in other professions approximate these models but understandably vary in the concepts used for their analysis and the degree of authority they invoke. But they are alike in that they portray a problem of practice. Whether they are chosen for the education of prospective practitioners depends on the degree to which they probe the principles or the theory on which the concepts of the profession rest and on the frequency with which they occur in practice.

Cases, therefore, constitute the problemata of the professional curriculum. In the training of prospective professionals, they form the core of the clinical experience. The students under the tutelage of the clinical professor demonstrate that they can apply theory to a particular situation. Clinical experience very often does not involve actual treatment of an actual patient by the student. Rather, it is a way of testing the student's understanding of theory. The clinical experience is not the same as a laboratory exercise. Internship introduces the student to actual practice, but still under supervision. Residency or apprenticeship in an actual enterprise, whether in the law office or a hospital or an engineering firm, provides practice with much less supervision. In the preparation of teachers, laboratory, clinical training, and internship tend to be collapsed under the rubric of practice teaching. But what does practice teaching in School A in Community X have in common with that in School B in Community Y, or even with School B in Community X? They may not be similar in the theory, the particular methodology, nor even the textbook.

A consensus of the learned in any field cannot and ought not be legislated. When some official body tries to impose one arbitrarily, it is balked by the term "learned," the antithesis of forced agreement. To be effective, such a consensus must grow out of the inquiry of scholars and their mutual criticism. In the present state of scholarship in and about education, such a consensus is difficult to find, even though the potential for it exists. Not the least reason for this is to be found in the sheer volume of research and publications that flow from doctoral theses and the typewriters and word processors of faculty members, old and young. Only doctoral committees and journal editors evaluate this flow, and these are so numerous and varied that a consensus of the learned must for some time remain a remote hope. Even textbooks, the unofficial authorities on curriculum, vary too widely to stablilize the field.

For these reasons, it is more promising to seek a basis for consensus, not in agreements on taxonomy or theory or modes of organization in the training of teachers, but rather in a standard set of problems or, more specifically, the videotape portrayal of such a set. But what reason is there to believe that such a set, however thoughtfully constructed, would constitute an acceptable consensus?

The reason for acceptance would have to be that the selected set of problems originated in the very constituency that is being trained to cope with them, namely, classroom teachers. It is to identify such a set of cases or problems that the project at the University of Illinois College of Education is directed.

The Illinois Project

At the outset several points need clarification. First, this project is not the first to construct case studies. Second, it is not claimed that this set will do for all phases of schooling. One could construct

case studies in educational administration, law, and finance.[6] Finally, the aim of the project is not simply to construct a set of cases, but rather to construct a set that is validated by the procedures of selection. No doubt creative educators can construct interesting and useful cases, and by assiduous research one could find situations in a classroom that occur with sufficient frequency to warrant their status as case studies. The Illinois Project depends on selection methods that will stand the scrutiny of two criteria: frequency of occurrence and generic importance. These sets may not coincide. Dozens of annoyances plague or irritate teachers, but they may not be important problems. Their occurrence and treatment may be so familiar and routinized as not to warrant systematic study. Many housekeeping chores fall into this category, as do those gritty encounters between staff members up and down the chain of command.

Not all predicaments are problems and not all problems are generic. To become standardized as a problem worthy of study by all prospective teachers, a case must involve principles, facts, and alternative hypotheses as to treatment.

Professors Steve Tozer and William Trent, both members of the faculty of the Educational Policy Studies Department, began by recruiting teachers to take EPS 301, a summer course in philosophy of education, as well as relying on the normal load of school teachers and other graduate students who take the course. In addition to the teachers taking EPS 301, teachers who enrolled in other summer-session education courses in Champaign and two off-campus sites (Chicago and East St. Louis) participated in the project by completing written survey forms.

A four-step procedure was decided upon. First, an open-ended response form was circulated on which teachers identified typical problematic situations. Their responses yielded 10 problem areas: (1) low status; (2) low student motivation; (3) parent-school relations; (4) problems with administration and administrators; (5) too many non-instructional duties; (6) lack of time; (7) discipline; (8) tracking, labeling, and standardized testing; (9) expectations to solve societal problems; and 10) lack of funding for materials, salaries, and programs.

In the second step, 40 members of the class were asked to examine the list of 10 problem areas and to provide examples from their own teaching that could count as specific instances of these categories. The result was a list of almost 100 "cases." After duplicates were eliminated, 75 cases remained as illustrations of the 10 general problem areas.

Next, the 75 cases were rearranged in random order; and 65 teachers were asked to grade them for importance on a scale of 1 to 4. Nineteen cases that were weighed most heavily constituted the base for further analysis. Finally, a list of these cases will be submitted to a national sample of teachers. These procedures are intended to ensure that the cases were not selected on a priori grounds or systematically based preferences, and that they do in fact represent situations that classroom teachers encounter with high frequency and judge to be eminently important.

Problems of Production

Once this list is completed and validated, a set of about 15 cases will be put on videotape. Plans for their production are now being developed. This raises the question as to whether the situations should be contrived, for example, as a movie would be contrived by professional actors and technicians. Or would it be better to search out naturalistic situations in real classrooms and photograph them? Should the situations sample various regions in the country and be produced on different sites, or should they be developed on one site? Problems with funding the project and distributing the product also will have to be worked out.

One sample videotape was produced during the summer project. It portrayed the attitudes of black male high school students toward schooling, careers, and a diversity of social situations. With a minimum of technical sophistication, the reactions of a school counselor, high school teachers, parents, and an administrator were put on tape. The personnel were recruited from the community, and no effort was made to coach the participants. The tape was reviewed and criticized by the summer-session class, and it received high marks from the students and from a number of television personnel.

Throughout the planning and production, the primacy of a valid sample and the quality of the tapes themselves will have to be maintained. It cannot be repeated two often that the cases cannot be regionally or theoretically idiosyncratic if they are to achieve the status of paradigms. It is essential that teacher training institutions in any state recognize the cases as portraying problems that they are facing. Nor can the cases be slanted to reflect particular philosophies of education. These differences will come out when they become the targets for analysis and discussion. The methods of selection that the project has employed provide assurance of this neutrality.

Such cases, properly produced, can become the focus for analysis, discussion, and evaluation in <u>every</u> course in the teacher education program. The sample videotape on the attitudes of black male students, for example, could be used in philosophical and social foundations, educational psychology, curriculum, administration, counseling, and methods courses. Every course in the teacher education curriculum could bring to bear its special disciplinary concepts, theoretical constructs, and research on its analysis and treatment. Above all, students and faculty, wherever they may be, could refer to Case X and know that their fellow students and teachers, wherever they are, will know what is meant.

Cases as Clinical Surrogates

A primary use of case studies is to serve as a surrogate of clinical teaching, where theory is applied under the scrutiny of a clinical professor.

In teacher training programs an analogue of this form of clinical teaching is hard to come by. It is not quite the sort of experience one gets in practice teaching -- although, as in all other educational matters,

it is risky to generalize. Not all practice teaching takes care to test theory under the tutelage of the master teacher or clinical teacher. The cases on videotape can serve as a useful substitute because the technology allows the tape to be stopped and reversed as needed, so discussion can be interspersed with watching.

Indeed, this may well be one of the major advantages of the case study. Classroom teachers have been criticized for being allergic to theory. Publishers often report that texts and workbooks must be very specific about matters of curriculum and methodology. Careful directions for procedure at every step in the lesson, they say, are highly appreciated by all concerned. This overreliance on directions accounts for much of the reluctance to grant professional status to classroom teaching. It is the mark of a craft to execute prescribed procedures with accuracy and skill. Given a predicament, the craftsperson needs only to identify the situation and apply the appropriate procedure. If that fails, another identification is made and its appropriate procedure applied. If all ploys fail, the predicament is turned over to a supervisor. The supervisor may have a wider repertory of situations; but if these also fail, there must be recourse to the engineer or architect or the physician, who, in turn, can resort to a hypothesis based on theory and prescribe accordingly.

Assuming that the teachers of teachers correspond to theoreticians in other professions, the testing of theory on cases becomes a prime ingredient of "professional" teacher education. Many of the current proposals for the reform of teacher education tend to slur over this phase of instruction because an analogue of the clinical situation is not available.

Supplementary Materials

Unlike cases in other professional schools, these do not have a well-documented set of solutions in the form of court decisions or standard procedures. To be sure, there are problems in education that have been processed by the courts, and these are useful in the education of administrators, policy makers, and professors of school administration. However, the situations described by such cases are not, as a rule, the point at which the classroom teacher directly intersects with the pupil, parents, or colleagues.

The situations the Illinois sample has identified have no canonical descriptions or solutions. There is, no doubt, a considerable volume of research that bears on them; but rarely is there a manageable set of studies that the field accepts as definitive. What the textbooks in methods courses have to say about these situations depends, of course, on the text and on the course instructor who chose the text.

The last phase of the project will provide background materials for both the teacher of the course and the student. These will serve as a source and critical discussion of suggested solutions. Here, too, a wide range of materials is possible, from simple bibliographies to sophisticated analyses.

However, some professors will want to use the tapes without literature of any kind, preferring to choose their own study materials. Whatever approach the instructor chooses, this much can be expected as reasonable outcomes: a demonstrated ability to analyze the tape for the locus of the difficulty, to identify the causes of the difficulty and to give reasons for the identification, to supply analogous cases, to hypothesize as to treatments, and to defend them.

In conclusion, it should be noted that these or other case study surrogates cannot take the place of a consensus of the learned. A genuine consensus awaits developments in the educational theory and research that one hopes will emerge. Educational studies and research may one day be studied carefully, tested, discussed, and either survive to be read another day or be allowed to rest in oblivion. Educational research today has no systematic (formal or informal) way to do this, with the result that it does not face a scarcity of production but rather a waste disposal problem. If these cases are no substitute for a genuine consensus of the learned, they may be a small first step toward establishing one.

[1]In the Thirties, it will be recalled, schools were blamed for their failure to train graduates for jobs. The Forties found the war taking the minds of critics off the schools, except to blame them for the inadequacies of the cohorts drafted for military service, albeit the unemployment problem was now solved. The Fifties loosed a flood of criticism of the public schools and teachers colleges as "Educational Wastelands" while the nation faced post-war problems at home and abroad. The Sixties witnessed the feverish reconstruction of science and math curricula in order to meet the challenge of Sputnik; while the Seventies, faced with the problems of Vietnam and the march toward the Great Society, found the schools uncaring of minorities. In the Eighties the schools are blamed for the nation being at risk, and the cry for excellence -- especially in math and science -- is heard once more. An interesting insight into these decades is provided by the Fiftieth Anniversary Commemorative Issue of The Education Digest. Its collection of "Seminal articles and authors, selected from a half-century of the Education Digest," is arranged by decades.

[2]The term paradigm was made popular by Thomas Kuhn in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962). It takes a revolution in science to bring about a change in the standard problems and categories that occupy the energies of the scientific community.

[3]By H. S. Broudy and John R. Palmer, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965, adapted from the chapter in Handbook of Research in Teaching, edited by N. L. Gage, 1963.

[4]H. S. Broudy, "Didactics, Heuristics, and Philetics," Educational Theory, 22, No. 3 (Summer 1972), 251-261.

[5]Cf. Exemplars of Teaching, p. 23.

[6]For example, a recent volume is entitled Case Studies in Educational Management, edited by S. Gould, H. Bell, T. Bush, A. Cox, and J. Godey (London: Harper & Row, 1984). Some of the studies are based on already published materials. Others have been specially commissioned. Some rely on data derived from interviews; while others incorporate documentary evidence, data from questionnaires, diary records, or observation of meetings.

Two sources of information on problem-based case-study are the growing literature in teacher-identified problems and the literature in protocol materials. See, for example, the extensive bibliography in Simon Veenman, "Perceived Problems of Beginning Teachers," Review of Educational Research 54:2 (Summer 1984) pp. 143-178. A good bibliography on the protocol materials movement, which has made extensive use of case study techniques, may be found in Willis D. Copeland, "Laboratory Experiences in Teacher Education," Encyclopedia of Education, H. Mitzel, ed., New York, The Free Press, 1982.